

12 - Heading - Attacking and Defensive

Many young players are afraid of heading the ball, they fear it will hurt which, if they get it wrong, it probably will. It is important then to gradually and carefully introduce heading and help players to gain confidence. Remind them that teams who will head the ball have a big advantage over opponents who will not.

Make sure you are using a light or slightly soft ball and that it is the correct size for the age of player. Begin by allowing players to throw the ball up for themselves to header before having a team-mate throw the serve over gradually greater distances. Diving headers can be coached by starting from a kneeling position. Work on both defensive and attacking headers.

Tip: To help young players learn the correct part of their head to use you can have them lick their finger and draw a small circle on their forehead. As it evaporates they will feel a cold patch exactly where they should be hitting the ball.

Coaching Points - Observe the following details:

- ✓ The player will need to move back or forward along the flight of the ball to be in the correct position to attack it
- ✓ Look at the body position, players need a good stance to get power on the ball
- ✓ Get them to stand side on with one foot in front of the other and knees bent
- ✓ Young players often close their eyes, teach them to keep their eyes open and focus on the flight of the ball
- ✓ Player's mouth should be shut to avoid jarring injury to the jaw
- ✓ The player should bend from the waist to generate power, neck muscles should be stiff on contact with ball
- ✓ Ensure that contact is with the correct part of the forehead
- ✓ Do they attack the ball with transfer of power? - it won't hurt unless the player waits for the ball to attack them
- ✓ For defensive header the player should claim the ball with big shout
- ✓ Do they jump to meet the ball as high as possible?
- ✓ Make contact with bottom half of ball and aim to get the ball away high and wide
- ✓ Supporting defender should drop a few yards to cover in case the ball goes over team-mate
- ✓ For attacking headers the player should be brave, get above defenders and make contact with top half of ball
- ✓ Try to aim downwards and across the keeper in direction the cross came from
- ✓ The ball can be redirected by turning their chest to face towards the target area of goal

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